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WOMEN IN THE *DICTIONARY OF DANISH INSULAR DIALECTS*



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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been pointed out that the language, thoughts and domains of women until recently have been strongly neglected in for instance literary studies and history – and that the representations have been characterised by stereotypical images. This point has also been made regarding dictionaries (Hageberg 1990; Mattisson 2006; Fjeld forthcoming).

In this article I discuss the representation of female domains in *Ømålsordbogen* (the *Dictionary of Danish Insular Dialects*, henceforth DID), an historical dictionary giving thorough descriptions of the dialects on the Danish isles, i.e. Seeland, Funen and surrounding islands. It covers the period from 1750 to 1950, the core period being 1850 to 1920. Publishing began in 1992 and the latest volume (11, *kurv-lindorm*) appeared in 2013, but data collection and structure of the dictionary date back to the 1920s and 1930s. DID is an interesting case regarding the representation of women: contrary to other lexicographic projects of similar scope and type, dating back to the same period, for instance *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* (SAOB, 1884-) (Mattisson 2006), traditional female domains like food, clothes, milk, etc. are thoroughly registered in the collections and described in the dictionary. The structure of DID being highly inspired by the *Wörter und Sachen* tradition (Bernales 1980), stressing the importance of ethnological descriptions and cultural context, this would seem natural: female labour was an intrinsic part of the dialect-speaking peasants' culture. However, concurrent ethnological representations of female domains at the Danish National Museum remained stereotypical and incomplete (Jørgensen 2013).

Why were female domains incorporated and accepted in such an apparently “natural” way in the DID project? In the following I discuss possible explanations. I focus on an analysis of the social field in which the structure and layout of DID were conceived and the ensuing collection of data was organised, i.e. the field of

dialectology. What was the scientific agenda in this field? Did issues and discourse about gender, especially women, play a role in the field, and if yes: how and to what extent? And to what extent was it possible to act as a female social agent (for instance as informant, local collaborator, editor)?

In the analysis I draw on the concept of field and social agency defined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1994). Using a variety of sources at the DID project (archives, project reports, biographical information) as well as previous studies, I try to establish the important characteristics of the game and agenda at the project and how it was constituted, especially regarding the treatment of female domains.

The article comprises the following sections: In section 2 I give an introduction to the theory of field along with examples related to the present analysis. In section 3 I give a description of the DID project and the impact of the Wörter und Sachen tradition. In section 4 I discuss how and to which degree it was possible to be and act as female in and around the DID project; first I look at the informants (4.1), next the local collaborators (4.2) and last the editors (4.3). A short discussion and conclusion is given in section 5.

2. THE CONCEPT OF FIELD

The concept of field is used to make empirically based descriptions of social agency and constitutive agendas in a given sphere (for instance the field of dialectology; or the field of fine arts, cf. Bourdieu 1992). Fields arise when social agents agree that a particular issue is important, and fields define a space of possibilities, i.e. a universe of problems, issues, goals, etc. that are recognised as relevant but also always at stake (for instance which kind of data and vocabulary to include in a dialect dictionary).

Social agents engage in the game of the field in different ways. They make investments, discursive as well as material, establishing institutions, positions, projects, etc. (for instance DID) as well as narratives, evaluations, etc. (for instance regarding data collection and ideal informants). Externally the agents in the field strive for recognition of the field in relation to other fields (for instance the importance of dealing with dialectology within linguistics and society as a whole). Internally they discuss which kind of game and which kind of agent is the better one (for instance if an agent in the field of dialectology can be female,

or a local collaborator without a formal education can be recognised as a proper agent in the field).

Determining the agenda as well as the objective possibilities in the field of dialectology is relevant to understanding the thorough description of female domains. However, it is also relevant to deal with preconscious levels of social agency, i.e. the parts of reality that are taken for granted and seen as “natural”. The idea that women are meant to give birth to and take care of children, for instance, prevailed until the late 19th century – and not only as an idea, women did not have formal access to neither education nor the labour market (cf. Rosenbeck 2014). Bourdieu stresses that such ideas are conceptualisations with a social origin and history, they are products of social construal and struggle, i.e. what is conceivable is closely linked to what is objectively possible. The data suggest that the thorough description of female domains was seen as “naturally possible and relevant” in the DID project, and therefore it is interesting to go behind the apparently inconspicuous natural practice in the field of dialectology and trace its historical constitution. Recent studies corroborate the relevance of incorporating ideas of (preconscious) social agency in analyses of lexicographic practice and history. Fjeld (forthcoming), for instance, shows that gender bias is still prominent in modern dictionaries – a gender bias can still be seen in citations or definitions. In other words: the practice of editors continues partly to follow preconscious logics, based on stereotypical images of men and women. A similar conclusion has recently been made about the content and vocabulary of articles in Wikipedia (Wagner *et al.* 2015).

3. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE – MEN AND WOMEN

The DID project was initiated in 1909, but due to a number of factors, not least lack of organisation and funding, it was reorganised in 1922 (cf. Gudiksen & Hovmark 2009). During the 1920s and 1930s the main principles regarding data collection and structure of the coming dictionary were defined. One of the most important decisions was to make it a so-called *sproglig-saglig ordbog* (‘linguistic-cultural dictionary’). A comprehensive linguistic description of the different dialects (pronunciation, morphology, syntax, semantics) would still be the main goal, but DID should also give systematic descriptions of the culture and life world of the dialect-speaking peasants (and fishermen). Culture would mean folklore, traditions, feasts, etc. (*Fastelavn* ‘Shrovetide’), but equal or more

emphasis was laid on descriptions of (parts of) tools (*le* 'skythe', *kærne* 'churn', etc.), work processes (*høhøst* 'haymaking', *bagning* 'baking', etc.), central crops (*hør* 'flax', *kartoffel* 'potato', etc.) and artifacts (*træsko* 'clogs', etc.) – an approach which was also a central part of the scientific agenda in the field of ethnology (definition of types of tools, their evolution and geographical distribution) (Andersen 1939: 24; Gudiksen & Hovmark 2009: 37-43). Similar contemporary lexicographic projects followed the same agenda (cf. *Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wörterbuch*, *Mecklenburgisches Wörterbuch*). DID still follows this original plan, and not only in the general selection of lemmas: the cultural aspect is also described specifically in separate encyclopedic parts of relevant articles, sometimes as lengthy as 3 to 4 columns (cf. the entries *høst* 'harvest' or *bage* 'bake').

Theoretically, the plan was inspired by the German Wörter und Sachen tradition that emerged around 1900. This movement stressed the importance of the cultural context in which words were used, partly as a reaction against the Neogrammarians' (Junggrammatiker) narrow focus on sound laws and form (cf. Bernales 1980). However, the tradition was adopted in Denmark in a slightly modified way. In 1926 the dialectologist Peter Skautrup (1896-1982) wrote a prize dissertation describing the vocabulary of his own dialect (Skautrup 1927-79). The aim of the study was to give a full description of the vocabulary of this dialect, i.e. it aimed at covering all salient, concrete and abstract domains (including female). And in order to obtain this, Skautrup favoured a situational collection of data: coherent conversations with informants about different domains took center stage at the expense of examination on the basis of wordlists ordered alphabetically or according to sound patterns. The presentation of the dissertation reflected this idea: words were listed according to domains, not alphabetically, and a certain amount of illustrations was added. The dissertation had a number of theoretical references, but the goal was also practical-empirical: an approach based on domains would yield better, more authentic and complete data (Gudiksen & Hovmark 2009: 37-43).

This idea was adopted readily at DID. The project was in urgent need of data, and the editorial board quickly elaborated a special questionnaire which was in fact a huge wordlist with suggestive, exemplary vocabulary organised according to domains. The questionnaire would serve as a guide as well as a trigger: faced with the suggested vocabulary, informants were meant to deliver the relevant vocabulary in their specific dialect. The domain approach was given further emphasis as the project proceeded in the 1930s: the data were organised in

general and domain-specific vocabulary, and the editors started to pre-edit the different domains, making systems of keywords and synonyms.

It is evident that the language and culture approach had a major impact on the layout of the future dictionary and the collection of data, including the role of female domains. If we look at the domains in the big questionnaire as well as in the collections, female domains are present along with male (*høst* 'harvest', *brønd* 'well', *pløjning* 'ploughing', etc. along with *mælk* 'milk, milking', *brygning* 'brewing', *klæder og syning* 'clothes and sewing', etc.); to this should be added a fair amount of general, often abstract domains like *bevægelse* 'movement' or *atmosfære* 'atmosphere, weather'. Focus is on all aspects of the traditional peasant household, both male and female. The older peasant culture in the mid-19th century was characterised by rather harsh living conditions and a traditional division of labour, and all members of the household had to contribute and collaborate in order to survive, men and women each being responsible for different domains. This does not necessarily mean that the female domains in practice would get a proportional attention in the project, but they did.

It is interesting that no domains are explicitly marked as male or female. We have not found any examples of the editors talking about gender specificity, "male" or "female" domains or the like, in the archives of DID (editorial guides, minutes, manuals, articles). The female domains seem to have been accepted as a completely "natural" part of the project. The adoption of the Wörter und Sachen idea and the focus on describing the full vocabulary of the peasants can be seen as the direct reason for this. However, in the following section we suggest that a number of (earlier) developments in the fields of dialectology and folklore, and in society as a whole, also worked in favour of this result.

4. BEING FEMALE IN DIALECTOLOGY: POSSIBILITIES AND CONCEIVABLES

4.1. WOMEN AS INFORMANTS

On one of the shelves at the DID project we find the so-called "black box". This box contains around 1500 hand-written paper sheets with information about a considerable number of informants, i.e. qualitative, sometimes even personal, individual characterisations. The archive is highly revealing, not just about the informants, but also about the way the editorial board saw the ideal informant.

Women are well-represented in the archive. A purely quantitative estimate is not straightforward – the archive is far from complete. Furthermore, in the 1930s the editors visited a number of craftsmen (blacksmiths, clog makers, coopers, coach builders, etc.) due to a specific effort to register their specialised vocabulary and include it in the dictionary – and they were all male. But if we compare with the listing (by name) of local informants and collaborators in two comprehensive status reports (Andersen 1932, Andersen 1939), i.e. informants that were considered particularly important to the project, a ratio of around 30 % female informants seems plausible. In short: women could certainly serve as informants, and they were indeed appreciated and also evaluated with reference to the same standards as the male informants (quite a few of the male informants in the archive are actually characterised as useless).

It is obvious that if the editorial board wanted to describe the vocabulary of the female domains, they also had to have female informants. But such an argument is never stated explicitly. What is stated explicitly is the importance of finding a quite particular type of informant, regardless of gender. First, the informants were classified as first or second class linguistically and culturally, which reflects the *Wörter und Sachen* approach. But they were also characterised qualitatively. An ideal informant should have a good memory, fine sense of language and a thorough experience with older peasant culture. One of the most important female informants, Karen Hytteballe (1862-1947), was characterised as “Very old-fashioned in language and habits and very interested in the linguistic work, with good memory and very good sense of the linguistic form.” As a matter of fact, her husband also participated as first class informant.

The black box shows that the agenda was quite narrow or perhaps rather: very focused in the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1920s the Danish dialects and the peasant culture had already undergone considerable changes, and consequently the language and culture of peasants in the mid- to late 19th century – the older layer that was fast disappearing – were defined as the primary, core object of study. The situation was regarded as rather urgent: the old dialects had to be documented before it was too late (so-called “one foot in the grave dialectology”). Therefore, the editors focused on the traditional, “unspoiled” or “pure” dialects and the self-sufficient peasant household of the mid-19th century. This could even lead some editors to disregard informants that had had too much contact with newer ideas, practices and educational institutions, such as parts of the Danish Folk High School movement (cf. Pedersen 1991: 85; Køster 2009). Furthermore, data collection was difficult without modern transport, tape recorder, etc. In

other words: finding informants at all, i.e. alive and with a good sense of the older language and culture, was considered paramount.

However, the focus on the traditional peasant culture was not invented by the DID project, neither was the use of female informants. The interest in dialects and folk culture dated back to the national Romantic movement in the 19th century. Even the construal of the systematic, scientific collection of data dated back to the mid-19th century (Pedersen 2009; Christiansen 2013: 115-138). The peasant culture, their tales, habits, language, etc., had since long been the object of study in folklore as well as dialectology. In the mid-19th century diactologists started to visit informants personally. The typical informants were still male schoolmasters, vicars, etc. (Walton 1996: 320-321), but peasants also began to serve as direct informants. Primary, formal contact undoubtedly took place with the husbands, but peasant women would also be present. Early dialectologists rarely mention the gender of informants, but we know positively of a female informant from around 1880 (Jacobsen 1933: V). Female peasants also served as informants in the field of folklore: the gender of story-tellers was not decisive, the focus was on collecting interesting, unique tales (cf. Christiansen 2013). Thus, studying the ways and habits of male as well as female informants had probably turned into a well-established and “natural” part of the game in the 1920s (cf. for instance that Skautrup’s informant was his own mother). The adoption of the *Wörter und Sachen* ideas in the 1920s favoured an ample representation of female domains, but in fact the way had already been paved in the fields of dialectology and folklore. The fields of dialectology and folklore were by the way closely connected during the first half of the 20th century, both practically and scientifically (Gudiksen & Hovmark 2009: 14-21).

4.2. WOMEN AS COLLABORATORS

Women participated not only as informants but also as local collaborators in the DID project. By local collaborator I mean somebody who worked independently (but still under the guidance) of the editors and/or contributed with independent manuscripts or data. A few collaborators even organised local collections of data. In the following I give a brief characterisation of the most prominent female local collaborator, Anna Pedersen (1885-1972), as a way of describing this type of agent in the field.

Anna Pedersen impersonates a number of the characteristics that can be seen as typical of the female local collaborator: she was unmarried and lived alone;

she did not have a formal education, but made a living as “private teacher” and also received grants from DID for her contributions; she devoted her life to the work with her local dialect. Her work for the DID project was considered outstanding: she came to master the special phonetic notation that was used; she elaborated a phraseological questionnaire and organised a local collection of data; and she received an honorary article at her 75th birthday as well as an obituary in the journal of the DID project: *Danske Folkemaal* (Andersen 1974).

It is noteworthy that a number of female informants developed into collaborators: this was not the case in the mid-19th century, and the typical local collaborator was rather a male schoolteacher or vicar. This is related to the fact that the objective possibilities for women from the lower classes changed gradually in the latter half of the 19th century. We know of several “learned women” in early history of western societies, but they normally came from privileged backgrounds. During the 19th century girls from the lower classes, including peasants, began to enter the educational system (Thomsen 2013; Rosenbeck 2014). This development was favoured in Denmark by the creation and prosperous activity of the Folk High Schools from the mid-19th century onwards. These schools boosted the general educational level among young people in the rural population and they accepted female students – from the 1860s in separate school, from 1885 also in mixed schools. Furthermore, the rural population experienced economic growth and prosperity which produced a surplus and allowed for an increasing adoption of middle-class values and life-style along with the reproduction of traditional practices (Balle-Petersen 1980). In other words: a number of objective factors in the society as a whole lie behind the possibilities of becoming a female collaborator.

Did the female collaborators contribute particularly to the comprehensive representation of female domains? On the one hand, female collaborators did not focus especially on female domains, at least not as a general rule – they delivered data of all kinds, linguistic as well as cultural. On the other hand, they delivered substantial information about the female domains that they obviously knew better than their male counterparts. The three monographs edited by Anna Pedersen can serve as an example: the first one dealt with male domains, the second one with female domains, and the third one with feasts, traditions, etc. where men and women united (cf. Andersen 1974). Women are included along with men, apparently unmarked and naturally, but the description is also ideal: men and women are portrayed as complimentary entities, and women have their well-defined domains.

To the extent that collaborators understood and adapted to the game and rules in the scientific field, they were accepted. Anna Pedersen is even characterised as *en af vore egne* [...] *vor Kammerat i Videnskabens Værksted* ('one of our own [...] our companion in the workshop of science'), because she understood the importance and logic of verification and documentation (Andersen 1974: 1). Others did not succeed in the same way because they deviated from the positivistic ideas and expected, consecrated forms in the scientific field and preferred to express themselves in more subjective (female?) genres (cf. Ingemann 1980; Christiansen 2000).

4.3. WOMEN AS EDITORS

It is difficult to say if local collaborators can be characterised as proper agents in the field of dialectology. But the field did allow for a notable amount of female agency. This also goes for the editorial board.



Figure 1. Editors Kristen Møller and Ellen Raæ visiting local collaborator Anna Pedersen (1935)

By the 1920s women had had access to the university for 50 years (since 1875), but quite few had actually entered university and taken exams, and even fewer had obtained a position: universities, archives, hospitals, and other institutions, strongly resisted to engage female candidates (Rosenbeck 2014: 40-54). However, the DID project was not part of the university until 1960, and a female editor, Ellen Raae (1885-1965), was engaged as a student as the very first employee in 1922 along with the later leader, Poul Andersen. In 1929 three male editors were engaged and in 1931 yet another female staff member (but she never worked as an editor). A handful of male free-lance staff members also worked for the project in the early years (Gudixsen & Hovmark 2009).

Ellen Raae was the only female member of the editorial board, but the presence of a woman should not be underestimated. As Mattisson (2006) points out, the lack of any female editors at *Svenska Akademiens ordbok* (SAOB) until 1980 contributed strongly to the biased representation and use of female sources. And the contribution by Ellen Raae was in fact considerable. Not only did she pre-edit all central female domains except baking. She also edited one complicated male domain: “coach building” as well as more abstract topics. Furthermore, she was very productive and the quality of her pre-editions is higher than any other pre-editions. However, one might also claim that Ellen Raae paradoxically met all stereotypical gender expectations: she worked meticulously at the office and left the academic careers to her male colleagues (two out of four left the project in favour of senior positions at the Danish National Museum and the Arnamagnæan Commission; and the leader of DID, Poul Andersen, was deeply involved in the field of linguistics, for instance the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen, and he later became the first full professor of dialectology at the University of Copenhagen).

However, Ellen Raae is a much more interesting character. She might have been a hard-working girl at the office. But out of office she wrote a handful of novels, all dealing with the challenges of the young women who moved to the city, got educations and began to live a new life, economically, spiritually, and sexually (cf. Richard 2005: 190-215). She had been married for 13 years, but changed her life, entered university, got engaged at the DID, and made her debut as a novelist in 1938 at the age of 53. We cannot say if there is a direct causal relationship between her personal life and literary involvement – and her diligent work with the female domains at the DID project (cf. Hovmark, Forthcoming). However, she impersonates many of the characteristics of the first women who entered

academic fields as proper agents: she gained access, but stayed in a marginal or alternative position.

5. CONCLUSION

It is striking to see how naturally women and female domains became part of the DID project – it hardly seems to have been part of any agenda. In this study we have tried to trace the social preconditions behind this “natural presence”.

The adoption of female domains were clearly favoured by internal trends in the field of dialectology (and folklore): first the focus on the older peasant culture in its totality including the women’s contribution to the household; second the more practical need to act quickly and very goal-oriented regarding collection of data. However, external factors also played a role. By the late 19th century women’s liberation was already well under way in western societies, and these changes in the objective possibilities for women also favoured the ample representation of female domains. We believe that the presence of female agency in the field of dialectology (local collaborators, editor) played an important role and ensured that the female domains actually got a thorough treatment instead of just remaining a minor or unrealised part of a general, ideal plan (some domains, for instance folk dances, are quite poorly documented and described in DID due to lack of interest or bad management by certain editors).

However, women’s participation in other fields, for instance medicine, was highly controversial and gave rise to severe fights and discussions (Rosenbeck 2014: 40-48). One might ask why this was not the case in the field of dialectology. Rosenbeck (1992: 40-41) argues that when history was constituted as a science in the 19th century, the proper type of history was defined as economic and political history – whereas folklore and cultural history were deemed secondary, dealing with less important subject matters. Things might be slightly more complicated as regards dialectology: in the early 20th century dialectology still held high prestige and the agents in the field had close connections with neighbouring linguistic subfields. But even so: dialectology was probably dealing with a rather innocuous subject matter, also in terms of women’s liberation, i.e. the older peasant culture with well-defined, traditional gender roles, and the act of objectifying made it even more innocuous and under control (Rosenbeck 1992: 41-42). Furthermore, the interest in language and folklore had long been associated

with national romanticism and recognised as relevant, also by politicians (Pedersen 1991: 81-84). Last but not least: dialectology was incorporating folklore and culture, but the primary interest was still language, including formal structures, and a proper social-constructionist angle did not develop until the 1970s (Pedersen 2009: 70-71).

But the analysis of the agenda in the field of dialectology and the study of the DID archives also reveals that (controversial?) parts of the female story were excluded. We know that the strong agenda of urgency and the focus on the older peasant culture meant that other linguistic variants slipped out of sight, for instance the language of towns and cities (Pedersen 1991). The same goes for the considerable changes in peasant culture in the late 19th century (for instance the co-operative movement and early industrialisation), but this development has been gradually incorporated in the project: now DID also covers the period from 1920 to 1950, at least regarding the cultural descriptions. But other aspects of peasant culture were never included, for instance more intimate spheres (menopause etc.) or politics (peasant women were taking the first, tiny steps into local commissions etc. around 1900, cf. Thomsen 2013). The field was not ready for this part of human practice yet, despite the presence of female agency.

DID gives an ample description of female domains, but there are also gaps. The inclusion of female domains in the overall plan and the presence of female agency favoured a more balanced representation of women, but the study also draws attention to a certain amount of censorship in the dominating agenda in the field: women and female domains were only accepted if they complied with the game (Rosenbeck 2014: 128-132). However, the fact that so much data was collected, about female domains and in general, means that the present editors have a chance of modifying the picture, also regarding gender issues. The following citation can for instance be found under the entry *kvindemenneske* ('female'): (*at sætte stak*) *det var jo gerne mandfolkearbejde, ja kvindemennesker kunne jo også godt* '(setting up a stack of hay) that was typically male work, yeah well, women could also do it, that's true'.

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